

Report on the IERS-ASOP Summer Workshops on Education in Japan and the US

バーモント夏期ワークショップ

Over the past three summers, 2004-2006, the Institute for Educational Research and Service co-sponsored a workshop on the topic of Education in Japan and the US, together with the Asian Studies Outreach Program, a program which promotes understanding about Asia in Vermont's K-12 schools and is funded both by the Freeman Foundation and the US-Japan Foundation and housed at University of Vermont. This workshop was both an opportunity for educators from the United States to come and learn about Japanese educational practices, as well as a chance for educators from both countries to discuss current reforms that both systems face. During the workshop ICU students participated in luncheons and joined discussions with American educators, and the entourage of educators from Vermont visited a local elementary school and a junior high school.

Participants from Vermont included teachers of elementary, middle, and high school and university faculty, as well as educational administrators and ASOP program staff. Participants on the Japan side included ICU faculty, staff and students, as well as faculty, parents, and administrators at two middle schools and two elementary schools in Mitaka and Koganei Cities.

Workshop sessions were given in different years by myself, Professor Tachikawa and Mr. Hajime Arai, an ICU doctoral student in education, as well as by teachers from Vermont and administrators at local public schools in Tokyo. Topics about Japan included the culture of schooling, the dissonance between the ideals of freedom in democratic schooling and the realities of a highly managed society¹, patriotism and education in Japan versus the US, structural reforms, and the history textbook controversy. Regarding education in Vermont, teachers presented about teaching methods that accommodated the multiple intelligences of children, illustrating this with lessons that focus on maple sugaring from the perspectives of numerous subject areas. Additionally, participants were escorted by graduate students to visit important sites, such as Yasukuni Shrine, affording participants the opportunity to discuss the relationship between patriotism and education in Japanese and American contexts.

The workshop series over the three summers was beneficial in numerous identifiable ways and doubtless had a lasting impact in less noticeable ways. Plainly, it resulted in better understanding of education in Japan among students and teachers in Vermont, a better understanding of an American education system among Japanese school administrators and ICU students, an opportunity for reflective and comparative discussion by participants in general, and a large number of contacts for further research and educational activity.

To better understand the valuable dialogue that took place in the workshops, a bit should be said about the partner organization. The Asian Studies Outreach Program (ASOP) is a collaborative effort of the College of Education and Social Services and the College of Arts and Sciences, two out of the ten colleges at the University of Vermont. According to its Director, Dr. Jeu-Fei Wang, the goal of the program is to introduce Asia into the curriculum in schools in Vermont. ASOP conducts activities within Vermont to improve students' general understanding of Asia. Through this arm of the program, ASOP provides research services and library materials for both the high

school and university levels. It was awarded the Goldman Sachs Foundation Prize for Excellence in International Education in 2003, and so far ASOP has covered about 50% of schools in Vermont.

The other arm of ASOP is a program of overseas tours, in which Vermont educators travel to countries in Asia including China, Thailand and Japan. While in Japan the group of Vermont teachers and administrators visited schools in Kyoto, Wakayama, and here in Tokyo. After the first year, the leaders of the overseas program chose to start their tour in Tokyo, because they saw the IERS-co-sponsored workshop as the most valuable starting point at which to acquaint their participants with education in Japan. Through their overseas program, Vermont educators were able to take a comprehensive look at Japanese education at the levels of theory, policy and practice. The US-Japan Foundation has expressed to Dr. Wang their satisfaction with the Japan tour, launched from this workshop, and teachers also expressed their satisfaction with being able to learn a great deal about education in Japan.

Each year one or two of the workshop sessions were held in local public schools, including Higashi Junior High School in Koganei City and Iguchi Elementary School in Mitaka City. At these sessions, Vermont participants observed classrooms around the school and met with principals and vice principals, who then fielded questions about their school and operations. In some of the sessions, principals from neighboring schools gathered and Japanese school administrators presented on teacher evaluation efforts and on new ways in which schools are striving to match the elementary and junior high school curriculums to produce a coherent, 9-year learning community.

At all of these sessions, extensive discussion revealed similarities and differences between education movements that are mutually affecting our schools in both countries. PTA members with overseas experience from two local elementary schools also participated, assisting in interpretation and lending yet another perspective. Discussion was also lively during workshop sessions held on ICU campus, attended also by a number of undergraduate and graduate students, who actively joined in discussion with educators from Vermont.

The contacts established through these visits have subsequently led to numerous research projects at the two schools visited. For example, interview and observation studies have been easy to arrange for myself as well as at least one other ICU faculty member and for numerous graduate students working on comparative education research projects. School administrators have shown an active interest in building research links with ICU, and their ready geographic accessibility has proven a boon for ICU students as well.

As of the summer 2006 workshop, the US-Japan Foundation Grant sunsetted and the workshop series was completed. In retrospect, the workshop series involved considerable work in making arrangements, preparing workshop lectures, involving students, and planning movements of large groups between schools. The benefits, however, have also been clear: increased knowledge of Japan among a good number of teachers and a much larger number of students in Vermont, a deeper comparative understanding of relative reform trends in the two countries on my part, an intellectually stimulating experience for numerous ICU faculty and students, and strong and cordial research relationships with local public schools. The role of IERS in providing a venue for the many discussions and extensive learning opportunities for all who participated can hardly be overstated.

This talk was based on a study subsequently published by Akira Tachikawa in Volume 47 (March 2005) of Educational Studies: "What 'Democratic' Teachers Did to Their Pupils During Postwar Years," pp.11-22.

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